



Commentary

Title: Seasonal Decorations

Issued: October 2003

Holiday safety is important because of the increased risk of fire. The main decorating season is the period around Christmas and New Year. The following recommendations apply to other seasonal decorations as well. The goal is fire safe holidays.

Christmas Trees:

- Re-cut a natural tree trunk diagonally at least 25mm (1 inch) above the original cut so it can absorb water, immediately before setting up the tree. Natural trees require a large amount of water, up to 4 litres per day. Use a stand that has a large water reservoir.
- Make sure a natural tree has a constant supply of water – check it frequently everyday to ensure it has not dried out. The tree is dry if needles are brittle, or if needles fall or are easily pulled off. A dry tree is extremely flammable and should be removed from the building.
- In **public** buildings, such as churches, halls, schools and offices, natural trees should not be kept in the building longer than 10 days. A natural tree may dry out in less than 10 days even if standing in water and therefore, should be checked daily to ensure it is not dried out. A dry tree must be removed from the building. The property owner is advised to replace a dried-out tree with a fresh tree if the decoration is still required.
- Artificial trees should be labeled as flame resistant by a recognized testing agency such as CSA or ULC.
- Place trees at least 1 metre (3 feet) away from any heat sources.
- Use a sturdy stand that will prevent the tree from tipping over and creating an obstruction.
- Trees must be located so they will not block doors or escape routes from the building.
- The tree must not block exit signs, fire alarm stations, fire extinguishers, emergency lighting or other fire safety devices from view or use.

Lights:

- All lighting must be labeled by a testing agency such CSA or ULC.
- Lighting sets with worn or frayed cords or damaged bulb connections should be replaced.
- Make sure tree lighting is listed for indoor use and follow manufacturer's instructions for installation and maintenance.
- Unplug or turn tree lighting off when the building is unattended.
- Never use electric lights on metallic trees.
- When decorating outside ensure lighting is labeled for outdoor use.

Other Decorations:

- All wall and ceiling decorations such as wall hangings and streamers must either be flame resistant or have the same flame-spread rating as required for the interior finish of the room in which they are located.
- Other decorations should be manufactured from flame resistant materials.
- There are no known chemicals to treat decorations to make them fire safe. The use of any treatment does not permit fire safety practices to be ignored.
- The use of spruce boughs, hay bales and other natural decorations is not recommended because they cannot be kept from drying out and creating a serious fire hazard.
- Candles must never be used to decorate trees.
- Open flame devices such as candles create extreme fire hazards. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that open flame devices not be used as decorations. If, however, open flame devices are used the National Fire Code of Canada, 1995 requires that they are securely supported in noncombustible holders and located or protected to prevent decorations, clothing and other combustible materials from coming into contact with the flame.